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NOFORN, SIPDIS

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TAGS: [MASS](#) [PA](#) [PGOV](#) [PM](#) [PREL](#)
SUBJECT: DEPLOYMENTS OF U.S. SPECIAL FORCES IN PARAGUAY

REFS: A) ASUNCION 426 B)ASUNCION 418

Classified By: Assistant Secretary, Thomas A. Shannon;
Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (U) This is an action message. See paragraph eight.

¶2. (S/NF) SUMMARY: Since 2006, U.S. Special Forces Operational Detachment Alpha (ODA) has been engaged in equipping and training Paraguay's Joint Special Forces Unit (BCFE) with the implicit support of the government of Paraguay (including pursuant to Section 1208 of the National Defense Authorization Act for FY05, as amended). Although the Lugo administration in Paraguay has expressed interest in strengthening our mil/mil relationship in the long term, the GOP wants to put further assistance from the Special Forces ODA on hold at the conclusion of the training in September.

According to Special Operations Component, U.S. Southern Command (SOCSOUTH), key mission objectives have been accomplished to the extent possible, and USSOUTHCOM plans to terminate this phase of the effort at the end of the fiscal year. By mutual agreement between the USG and the GOP, the members of the U.S. Special Forces ODA unit engaged in training and equipping the BCFE will depart Paraguay at the end of September, when the training of the BCFE ends. Two Special Operations Command, Forward (SOCFWD) personnel will remain in Paraguay to monitor the transition of Section 1208-funded equipment to the GOP. SOCSOUTH plans to deploy a short-term TDY 12-person ODA team in the third quarter of FY2010 to evaluate the consolidation of the BCFE and reinforce its capabilities. The Department recognizes the need to move forward to plan this deployment, but requests post consult with the Department closer to the actual deployment date before granting final country clearance. DoD is aware of the Department's concerns and will consult with us as we get closer to the event regarding the feasibility of a deployment in the third quarter of FY10. Upon receipt of additional, detailed guidance, Post should be prepared to initiate discussions with the GOP to obtain written legal protection from the GOP for U.S. forces for any future activity. End Summary.

STATUS OF U.S. FORCES IN PARAGUAY

¶3. (S/NF) Since 2006, the U.S. government has invested significant resources to help establish, train, and equip Paraguay's new rapid reaction force (BCFE); has supported the creation of a Paraguayan-flagged

peacekeeping unit under the Global Peace Operations Initiative; and has implemented well-received humanitarian assistance projects. We understand from post that there are currently 21 long-term TDY DOD staff positions in Paraguay that are not covered under diplomatic or administrative and technical staff status, including the six-member Special Forces ODA working with the BCFE, a four-person MIST team, a six-person civil-military support element (CMSE) for humanitarian projects, and five Special Operations Command Forward Headquarters (SOCFWD-HQ) staff. Six members of the ODA team and three members of the SOCFWD-HQ are scheduled to depart Paraguay by the end of September. SOCSOUTH plans to deploy a 12-person ODA team in the third quarter of FY2010 for a short-term TDY to provide follow-up training and evaluation of the BCFE.

GOP POSITION ON US MILITARY COOPERATION

¶4. (S/NF) Ambassador Ayalde has repeatedly sought clarification from the new GOP administration regarding its position on U.S. military cooperation in Paraguay. President Lugo has expressed support for strengthening the relationship and values the operational capacity of the newly trained BCFE. Nonetheless, the GOP has been reluctant to provide a written request for assistance or to provide in writing status protections for U.S. military personnel not accredited to the Embassy. In a June 30 meeting between the Ambassador and Lugo, President Lugo noted that the Minister of Defense had objections to U.S. military cooperation. Lugo said he would meet with the MOD and others and promised to provide greater clarity on the GOP's intentions (REF B: ASUNCION 418).

¶5. (S/NF) On July 7, 2009, the Foreign Minister requested a meeting with the Charge to inform him of the GOP's decision to suspend any subsequent USG assistance to the BCFE at the end of the current training in September (REF A: ASUNCION 426). The Foreign Minister said the GOP is interested in deepening our mil-mil relationship, but that it needed a break ("un pequeno descanso") to mark a shift from the past administration. In the meeting, the Foreign Minister said the continued presence of significant numbers of U.S. security forces in Paraguay without the explicit and public agreement of the GOP is a potential political liability for both the United States and the GOP. Nevertheless, he stated that other Special Operations units currently in Paraguay - a civil-military support element, a MIST team, and the SOCFWD-PY headquarters team working out of the Embassy - are welcome to stay. By mutual agreement between the USG and the GOP, the members of the U.S. Special Forces ODA unit engaged in training and equipping the BCFE will depart Paraguay in September at the conclusion of the training. The Foreign Minister also said that President Lugo intends to conclude a "security cooperation agreement" with the USG before the end of the year. Such an agreement, he said, would cover the entire range of engagements and cooperation between the two militaries. We note, however, this is not the first such commitment the GOP has made, and the GOP, to date, has not provided any details on what it proposes. Also, there has been no authority granted pursuant to Circular 175 procedures to negotiate such an agreement on behalf of the United States.

POLITICAL CONTEXT

¶6. (S/NF) One year into office, President Lugo is confronted by the reality of governing with a fractured ruling coalition, an antagonistic Congress, and entrenched systemic corruption. Lugo has proven resilient, and thus far has weathered deliberate destabilization efforts that included a wave of small

explosive devices and bomb threats in Asuncion. Nevertheless, rumors of coup-plotting persist along with a continual erosion of Lugo's political capital. Given the current environment and the absence of written status protections for all DoD personnel in Paraguay, their presence poses a potential political risk. At any point, those who oppose Lugo or merely wish to weaken his ties to the United States may publicly raise the issue of U.S. forces in Paraguay and speculate about their role in a way that undercuts U.S. interests. In addition, there is a potential personal risk to U.S. forces on training missions in Paraguay without the benefit of status protections or equivalent.

REGIONAL CONCERNS

¶17. (S/NF) Recent reaction to the proposed U.S. military presence in Colombia, as well as previous concerns about the U.S. Fourth Fleet and false rumors about U.S. military bases in Paraguay, underscore the need to evaluate not only the bilateral implications of our military relationship with Paraguay, but the regional context as well. The SOCSOUTH engagement in Paraguay over the past few years has successfully increased the GOP capacity to respond to threats, particularly those related to the Tri-Border area. Although it is important to continue to work with Paraguay and maintain the successful relationships that have been built, regional political sensibilities must be considered as we look to the future of our military engagement with Paraguay. The long-term presence of significant numbers of U.S. Special Forces in Paraguay could engender negative regional reactions that would undermine regional policy objectives. Continued dialogue between the Department of State and Department of Defense on how we engage the Lugo administration on military cooperation is critical to striking the right balance.

ACTION REQUEST

¶18. (S/NF) The Department of State understands the remaining members of the SOCFWD-PY ODA training team will depart post by September 30, 2009. In addition, the Department of State is aware SOCSOUTH tentatively plans to deploy a 12-person ODA team in the third quarter of FY2010 for a short-term TDY to provide follow-up training and evaluation of the BCFE. The Department of State recognizes the need for SOCSOUTH to plan for this deployment in advance.

¶19. (S/NF) There are clear advantages for moving forward with the deployment if the risks are not too great. But there is some risk that in the current political environment in which the presence of U.S. forces in Colombia is being publicly criticized by some governments, disclosure by a third country government of the presence of U.S. forces along with misinformation or mischaracterization could damage our future ability to engage in mil-mil cooperation with Paraguay or with others in the region. Due to the aforementioned USG and GOP concerns and the importance of evaluating the regional political situation closer to the time of actual deployment, the Department of State requests post consult with the Department prior to granting country clearance to this and future ODA deployments. Country clearance should be considered as close to the actual deployment date as possible, but no less than two months prior to the deployment. The Department of State also strongly encourages post to make the GOP aware of the need for written status-of-forces protections for future deployments of DoD personnel and to begin preparing the GOP for eventual discussions regarding a status-of-forces agreement, once the regional situation lends

itself to such an agreement, and once authority to negotiate such an agreement on behalf of the United States is granted pursuant to Circular 175 procedures. Post should note that such status protection agreements may involve several months of work both within the interagency and with the host nation, and should begin working with USSOUTHCOM approximately six months in advance of the proposed deployment to ensure necessary protections can be obtained.

CLINTON